



NEWS RELEASE

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Influenza Vaccine Clinics To Begin Statewide

(Salt Lake City, UT) – With so much attention being given to West Nile Virus recently it's important not to overlook a much greater public health risk – the flu. Each year in the United States millions of people get the flu, which results in about 114,000 hospitalizations and 20,000 deaths. The flu vaccine is the best tool to prevent death and severe illness from influenza among the elderly and chronically ill.

State and local public health officials are preparing for the upcoming flu season and expect that vaccine supplies will be sufficient if Utahns follow the current vaccine recommendations. "The influenza vaccine will be available at many clinics beginning this week and throughout October for individuals at highest risk of complications," says Rebecca Ward, Immunization Education Outreach Coordinator of the Utah Department of Health (UDOH). Persons who are not at high risk are encouraged to wait until November.

During a normal flu season the best time to vaccinate is during October and November – especially for persons at highest risk. Utah's flu season typically runs from November through March with peak levels in January and February. The UDOH encourages providers to continue vaccinating through December or later, as long as vaccine is available. Protective antibodies usually develop about two weeks after vaccination.

Influenza vaccine clinics will focus on vaccinating those at greatest risk for complications from influenza infection and others in close contact with them. The following groups should be vaccinated in October:

- persons 65 years and older
- residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities of any age who have long-term illnesses
- healthcare workers

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- household contacts and others who can transmit influenza to those at high risk
- adults and children over 6 months of age who have chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma
- adults and children over 6 months of age who need regular medical care or had to be hospitalized because of metabolic diseases (like diabetes), chronic kidney disease, or weakened immune system (including immune system problems caused by medicine or by infection with human immunodeficiency virus [HIV/AIDS])
- children and teenagers 6 months to 18 years who are on long-term aspirin therapy and therefore could develop Reye Syndrome after the flu
- women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the flu season

Beginning in 2000, vaccination was recommended for people 50-64 years due to the number of high-risk 50-64 year olds who need a flu shot. While people in this age group without chronic (long-term) medical conditions may not be at high risk from the flu, about 26 percent of people aged 50-64 years do have high-risk conditions and are at increased risk for serious flu-related complications.

In the spring of 2002, influenza vaccination was also recommended for healthy children from 6 to 23 months of age. Children less than 9 years of age who receive vaccine for the first time need a booster dose one month after the first dose. Parents should check with their health care provider to discuss annual influenza vaccination of healthy children in these age groups.

The UDOH recommends that high-risk individuals also receive the pneumonia vaccine because pneumonia is a life-threatening complication resulting from influenza. Pneumonia vaccine can be given year round and is usually given just once in a lifetime.

For more information about influenza and pneumonia vaccinations, contact your health care provider or the UDOH's Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.